

# Introduction to Cultural Studies

This lecture course will introduce concepts and methods for the study of culture. Beginning with an overview of central categories such as signs, media, body, time, space, memory and identity, it will then proceed to analyse and interpret a wide variety of practices, texts, media products and popular culture items from the fields of British Studies and Postcolonial Studies in order to demonstrate how theoretically informed 'readings' of culture can enhance our understanding of the world.

Downloads (PDF): <http://www.uni-tuebingen.de/engl/>  
(>Downloads>II Lecture Courses>Introduction to Cultural Studies)  
(see also >III Seminars>HS/OS Key Terms for Studying Culture  
>Terminology / Case Studies)

## Lecture 1:

### Introduction: Cultural Studies, *Kulturwissenschaft* and the Study of Culture

#### [0) Requirements / Organisation / Tutorials]

##### 1) Components of 'Culture Studies'

##### 2) What is Culture?

##### 3) How to Observe Culture (Locations of Culture)

##### 4) Course Overview

# 1) Components of 'Culture Studies'

## The Field in Germany:

'Landeskunde' – 'Cultural Studies' – 'Kulturwissenschaften'

↓

'Culture Studies'? – 'The Study of Culture'?

### 'Landeskunde':

- traditionally concerned with the factual/historical/cultural knowledge taught as necessary 'background' for the philological study of modern (i.e. national) literatures
- more recently: regional studies

### 'Cultural Studies':

- '(British) Cultural Studies':  
integrative analysis of culture as institutionalised in Great Britain after WW II on Marxist foundations;  
the focus is on problems of race, class, and gender in contemporary popular culture (Richard Hoggart, Raymond Williams, E.P. Thompson, Stuart Hall; Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies Birmingham)  
(cf. Christian Huck, "British Cultural Studies," in: Middeke 2012, 271-286).
- 'American Studies':
- interdisciplinary approach to analysing American culture and society as established and developed in US since the 1940s; strong historical focus  
(cf. Winfried Fluck, "American Cultural Studies," in: Middeke 2012, 287-300)

### 'Kulturwissenschaft':

- term used to designate the new orientation in the humanities emerging in Germany from the 1980s onwards  
(beginning with a shift from 'Volkskunde' to anthropology/ethnology and then spreading to literary studies in particular: 'the cultural turn', followed by various 'cultural turns' such as 'the performative turn', 'the iconic turn', 'the spatial turn', etc. as described in Bachmann-Medick 2006)
- focus is on analysis and interpretation of cultural sign systems and on intercultural competence

- ▶ current discussion is drawing on all four traditions, but tends to neglect their differing cultural functions:
  - 'Landeskunde': positivistic accumulation of factual knowledge
  - 'British Cultural Studies': critical intervention in cultural affairs in GB
  - 'American Studies': original affirmative function supporting emergence of American identity according to the melting pot ideal only recently replaced by critical focus on gender/race/class
- ▶ 'Kulturwissenschaften' are the most explicitly theoretical enterprise; they attempt to make the most recent stages of theoretical reflection (structuralism, poststructuralism/deconstruction, semiotics, media theory) viable in cultural analysis (→ culture as semiotic/textual/medial 'web' which constitutes reality) and to widen traditional perspectives by establishing new interdisciplinary contacts between the philologies and historiography on the one hand and disciplines which have a longer tradition of cultural analysis such as anthropology, ethnology, sociology on the other.
- ▶ 'The Study of Culture' as a favoured new term  
(cf. Ansgar Nünning, "Transnational Approaches to the Study of Culture," in: Middeke 2012, 261-270; Birgit Neumann & Ansgar Nünning, eds., *Travelling Concepts for the Study of Culture*. Berlin/New York: De Gruyter, 2012)
- ▶ 'Culture Studies' seems to be another viable alternative for the specifically German mixture of Landeskunde/Regional Studies, Cultural Studies and *Kulturwissenschaft*

but:

I find myself frequently troubled by the word *culture* as a noun but centrally attached to the adjectival form of the word, that is, *cultural*. When I reflect on why this is so, I realize that much of the problem with the noun form has to do with the implication that culture is some kind of object, thing, or substance, whether physical or metaphysical. This substantialization seems to bring culture back into the discursive space of race, the very idea which it was originally designed to combat. Implying a mental substance, the noun *culture* appears to privilege the sort of sharing, agreeing and bonding that fly in the face of the facts of unequal knowledge and the differential prestige of lifestyles, and to discourage attention to the worldviews and agency of those who are marginalized or dominated. Viewed as a physical substance, culture begins to smack of any variety of biologisms, including race, which we have recently outgrown as scientific categories [...]

If *culture* as a noun seems to carry associations with some sort of substance in ways that appear to conceal more than they reveal, *cultural* the adjective moves one into a realm of differences, contrasts, and comparisons that is helpful. This adjectival sense of culture, which builds on the context-sensitive, contrast-centered heart of Saussurean linguistics, seems to me one of the virtues of structuralism that we have tended to forget in our haste to attack it for its ahistorical, formal, binary, mentalist, and textualist associations.

The most valuable feature of the concept of culture is the concept of difference, a contrastive rather than substantive property of certain things. [...] [I]ts main virtue is that it is a useful heuristic that can highlight points of similarity and contrast between all sorts of categories, classes, genders, roles, groups, and nations. When we therefore point to a practice, a distinction, a conception, an object, or an ideology as having a cultural dimension (notice the adjectival use), we stress the idea of situated difference, that is, difference in relation to something local, embodied, and significant. This point can be summarized in the following form: culture is not usefully regarded as a substance but is better regarded as a dimension of phenomena, a dimension that attends to situated and embodies difference. Stressing the dimensionality of culture rather than its substantiality permits our thinking of culture less as a property of individuals and groups and more as a heuristic device that we can use to talk about difference.

Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalisation*[1996]. Minneapolis/London: U of Minnesota P, 2010: 12-13.

## 2) What Is Culture?

### a) Culture as a Historical Term:

emphatic/rhetorical usage since the 18th century focused on marking social hierarchies and distinctions such as

- 18th C: Western/European culture vs. other cultures
- 19th C: bourgeois culture vs. working-class culture
- 20th C: multiplication/dissolution of hierarchies marked by 'culture'; individualisation of 'frames'

Seit dem 18. Jahrhundert führt der Kulturbegriff eine reflexive Komponente mit. Er besagt in jeder Anwendung, daß es auch andere Kulturen geben könnte. [...] Der Begriff konnte Einteilungen begründen und zugleich durch eine Gegenbegriffsvielfalt offen lassen, was er eigentlich meinte. Seit dem Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts kommt es zu einer zweiten Welle bemerkenswerter Ausdehnungen, und zwar nach unten. [...] Von Eingeborenenkulturen hatte man schon länger gesprochen. Das Interesse an Arbeiterkulturen kommt hinzu. [...] Heute gibt es auch Drogenkultur und Ähnliches. [...]

Dennoch ist dem Begriff, und das scheint den Hang nach unten zu motivieren, die Blickrichtung nach oben geblieben. Er verspricht etwas „Besseres“ [...]. Er leistet [...] die Legitimation von Unterscheidungen. Er ist oder war jedenfalls bis vor kurzem ein Mittelstandsbegriff. Auch diese immanente Beschränkung durch hierarchische Konnotationen könnte sich jedoch in Auflösung befinden. Sie setzt nämlich Standardisierungen, etwa des typischen Lebenslaufs oder von begrenzten Milieus voraus, die mehr und mehr entfallen [...] der Trend scheint in Richtung auf Individualisierung der „frames“ zu gehen, die man an sich selbst für sich selbst annimmt.

Niklas Luhmann, *Beobachtungen der Moderne*. Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1992: 197-199.  
(*Observations on Modernity*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1998)

## b) Culture as a Systematic/Analytic/Functional Term:

culture as 'collectively structured meaning', i.e. the totality of meaning constructions and symbolic orders in a given society

- standardisations of  
feeling / thought / communication / behaviour
- three dimensions:
  - the material dimension (artefacts)
  - the social dimension (society and its institutions)
  - the mental dimension (norms and values, structures of feeling and thinking, collective memory, knowledge)
- MEDIA – COMMUNICATION – COGNITION

- between 'cognitive autonomy' and 'social orientation' culture emerges as an 'order of symbolic orders'

Siegfried J. Schmidt, *Kognitive Autonomie und soziale Orientierung: Konstruktivistische Bemerkungen zum Zusammenhang von Kognition, Kommunikation, Medien und Kultur*. Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1994.

Die gesellschaftliche Reproduktion von Kommunikation muß danach über die Reproduktion von Themen laufen, die ihre Beiträge dann gewissermaßen selbst organisieren. Die Themen werden nicht fallweise neu erschaffen, sind aber andererseits auch nicht durch die Sprache, etwa als Wortschatz, in ausreichender Prägnanz vorgegeben [...] Es wird demnach ein dazwischenliegendes, Interaktion und Sprache vermittelndes Erfordernis geben - eine Art Vorrat möglicher Themen, die für rasche und rasch verständliche Aufnahme in konkreten kommunikativen Prozessen bereitstehen. Wir nennen diesen Themenvorrat *Kultur* und, wenn er eigens für Kommunikationszwecke aufbewahrt wird, *Semantik*.

Niklas Luhmann, *Soziale Systeme. Grundriß einer allgemeinen Theorie*. Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1984: 224. (*Social Systems*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1995)

Im Zusammenwirken aller Kommunikationsmedien – der Sprache, der Verbreitungsmedien und der symbolisch generalisierten Medien – kondensiert das, was man mit einem Gesamtausdruck *Kultur* nennen könnte. Kondensierung soll dabei heißen, daß der jeweils benutzte Sinn durch Wiederbenutzung in verschiedenen Situationen einerseits derselbe bleibt (denn sonst läge keine Wiederbenutzung vor), sich aber andererseits konfirmiert und dabei mit Bedeutungen anreichert, die nicht mehr auf eine Formel gebracht werden können. Das legt die Vermutung nahe, daß der Verweisungsüberschuß von Sinn selbst ein Resultat der Kondensierung und Konfirmierung von Sinn ist und daß Kommunikation diejenige Operation ist, die sich damit ihr eigenes Medium schafft.

Niklas Luhmann, *Die Gesellschaft der Gesellschaft*, Bd. 1. Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1997: 409. (*Theory of Society*. Vol. 1: Stanford: Stanford UP, 2012)

**Culture is not**

“the sum of all values [...] that furnish a society”,

but

“a continuous description which makes available possible counter-values to all values.”

**Culture is**

“generating, processing and reducing ambiguity.”

“Cultural objections to social structures are social structures themselves,”

but culture provides the

“possibility of observing society from within society as if one were observing it from the outside.”

Dirk Baecker, *Wozu Kultur?* Berlin: Kadmos, 2000: 9/81/83 (my translation)

### 3) How to Observe Culture (Locations of Culture)

**a) The Practice Paradigm**

- analyses routines of action as symptoms of implicit formations of knowledge in a given culture  
(e.g. rituals, customs, organisations, institutions etc.)
- influenced by phenomenology/hermeneutics with regard to relationships between subjectivity/intersubjectivity and practice and by structuralism with regard to the existence of structures of meaning beyond (inter-)subjectivity (plus philosophical influences: Wittgenstein, pragmatism)

**b) The Text Paradigm**

- analyses discursive and semiotic processes and structures in a given culture (texts, discourses, media)
- influence of theory developments outlined under the heading ‘The Linguistic Turn’, i.e. from de Saussure to Derrida/Foucault

**c) The Autopoiesis Paradigm**

- analyses mental constructions in cognitive systems
- influence of neuro-physiology, cybernetics, cognitive psychology

Andreas Reckwitz, “Praxis – Autopoiesis – Text: Drei Versionen des Cultural Turn in der Sozialtheorie.” In: Andreas Reckwitz, Holger Sievert, Hrsg., *Interpretation, Konstruktion, Kultur: Ein Paradigmenwechsel in den Sozialwissenschaften*. Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1999, 19-49.

### Fields of culture-oriented theory and practice:

- Gender studies, postcolonial theory, New Historicism, Cultural Materialism, Historical Discourse Analysis, systems-theoretical approaches
- literary anthropology (e.g. history of mentalities, functions of fictionality)
- cultural performance (art and other instances of symbolic practice, narrativity, the visual turn)
- memory and identity (the dialectics of identity and alterity, the poetics and politics of cultural memory)
- intertextuality/intermediality
- new forms of cultural history and/or culturally informed literary history

## 4) Course Overview

18 <sup>th</sup> April	Lecture 1	Introduction: Cultural Studies, <i>Kulturwissenschaft</i> , and the Study of Culture
25 <sup>th</sup> April	Lecture 2	Mimesis – Representation – Signs
2 <sup>nd</sup> May	Lecture 3	Changing Media Changing Cultures
(9 <sup>th</sup> May: Ascension Day)		
16 <sup>th</sup> May	Lecture 4	Culture as Text / Textual Culture
(23 <sup>rd</sup> May/30 <sup>th</sup> May: Whitsun Holiday/Corpus Christi)		
6 <sup>th</sup> June	Lecture 5	Visual Culture 1: Painting
13 <sup>th</sup> June	Lecture 6	Visual Culture 2: Photography
20 <sup>th</sup> June	Lecture 7	Visual Culture 3: Documentary Film
27 <sup>th</sup> June	Lecture 8	The Body – Time – Space
4 <sup>th</sup> July	Lecture 9	Memory and Identity
11 <sup>th</sup> July	Lecture 10	Popular Culture
18 <sup>th</sup> July	Lecture 11	Conclusion: Studying Cultures
25 <sup>th</sup> July	Written Exam	



## Bibliography Lecture 1:

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